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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 000211

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/IPA, AND FOR SENATOR MITCHELL  
ALSO PASS TO NSC FOR SHAPIRO AND PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2029

TAGS: PREL PGOV KPAL IS JO

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SPECIAL ENVOY MITCHELL'S JANUARY  
30-31 VISIT TO JORDAN

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Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Foremost on the mind of King Abdullah will be his desire for assurance that the U.S. has reinvigorated its pursuit of a two-state solution. The King pins the blame for the Gaza crisis on three factors: the perceived political vacuum during our presidential transition, doubts about a weakened Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's legitimacy, and the potential that Israeli elections may strengthen peace opponents. Jordan's leaders want the U.S. to convey a unified message about the peace process, given their belief that competing players in the past could pick and choose among different understandings of U.S. goals. In that regard, they were pleased by President Obama's outreach to the Muslim world in his Inaugural Address, by his calls to key Middle Eastern players the following day, and by the quick appointment and dispatch of the Special Envoy.

King: To Boost Moderates, Move Past Gaza to Peace

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¶2. (S) For the King, any effort to bolster the region's moderates must go beyond the Gaza denouement - and mere rhetorical and economic support to Abbas - to demonstrate visible progress toward Palestinian statehood. The King has lost patience for a peace "process" that does not bear fruit, having been burned by the failure of the Annapolis process (that he backed) to lead anywhere. He believes Israeli-Palestinian negotiations should pick up where they left off, with the principle already firmly established of an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and from settlements. The King strongly favors the Arab Peace Initiative, and he frequently speaks of a "57-State Solution" in which all the Arab and Muslim States embrace Israel in exchange for an end to the occupation. Both the King and the Foreign Minister have repeatedly observed that if the peace process is jump-started, everyone will forget Gaza.

¶3. (S) Throughout the Gaza crisis and ongoing, Jordan has played a major and constructive role as a conduit for local and international humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza. The King and his advisors urge that any humanitarian and reconstruction aid for Gaza be transshipped through Jordan and Egypt to avoid strengthening the position of Hamas or its Syrian, Iranian, and Qatari allies. Senior Jordanians are concerned that Qatar will funnel money directly to Hamas to be doled out to the people of Gaza, and are hopeful this can be prevented.

Talk of "Three-State Solution" Causes Heartburn

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¶4. (S) Jordanian officials are increasingly worried that

pressure will grow for Gaza to be placed under Egyptian control and for Jordan take over the West Bank in some capacity - an idea recently proposed by former U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Bolton in the Washington Post to some consternation. This anxiety has been heightened as Jordanian leaders grapple with uncertainties, including U.S. intentions under a new President, a possible electoral victory for Likud's Binyamin Netanyahu in February, ongoing Palestinian internal strife, and a peace process seen here as moribund. Support for Palestinian statehood has special resonance here because some 60 percent of the population have roots in the West Bank or Gaza and also because that very Palestinian-origin population is seen as a threat to the future of East Bank Jordanians in a Hashemite Kingdom.

¶5. (S) As a result, the GOJ remains vigilant against even the perception that moves are afoot to "solve" the Palestinian problem at the Kingdom's expense (i.e. Jordan becomes the alternative Palestinian homeland). The GOJ fears a failed peace process coupled with chaos in the West Bank will create inexorable pressure on Jordan to take responsibility for that territory and its people. While this concern may seem overwrought or passe, it comes up often. The steady drumbeat from our contacts holds that Israel wants the peace process to fail, allowing it to annex those parts of the West Bank that it wants while leaving Jordan holding the bag. Jordan, even as it strenuously backs the Palestinian leader, is anxious about Abu Mazen's staying power and, at times, questions Israel's commitment to peace talks. The King and others strongly object to Jordanian forces taking a direct role in the areas governed by the PA either now or as part of a future solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

#### Uncertain Future for GOJ-Hamas Talks

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¶6. (S) In recent months there was considerable speculation among the local commentariat that Jordan's renewal of contacts with Hamas the summer of 2008 under GID auspices was Jordan hedging its bets that Abbas could oversee the creation of a viable Palestinian state. (Note: Hamas leaders quite vocally oppose any compromise on right of return or extending Jordanian rule over the West Bank. End Note). This perception probably overstates GOJ concerns, but when asked whether by engaging with Hamas, Jordan was undermining Abbas, official interlocutors simply pointed out that Israel meets with Hamas through Egypt, that Syria and Iran are actively engaged with Hamas, and that Jordan cannot be disengaged. However, with the dismissal in December 2008 of GID Director Dahabi, the future of the GOJ-Hamas dialogue is up in the air. Prince Ali has suggested that Jordan may back away from its dialogue with Hamas and urged the U.S. to avoid any direct discussions with the group. If U.S. contact with Hamas is desirable, he suggested it be done through Arab moderates.

#### Putting the Muslim Brothers Back in Their Box?

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¶7. (C) Following a string of highly organized protests and other displays of public rage over Gaza, Jordan's Islamists are clearly feeling emboldened. During a rally on January 23 to celebrate the "victory of the resistance in the Gaza Strip," Islamic Action Front head Zaki Beni-Irshaid called Hamas "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" and urged humanitarian aid from Jordan to be sent directly to Hamas rather than UNRWA. Observers gave mixed reviews of the King's management of the domestic response to Gaza. Some assessed that the state's flexibility allowed it to sidestep claims that it was not doing enough to end the Gaza crisis. Others saw the King's reluctance to criticize Hamas as a sign of weakness. Several judged that letting Palestinian-Jordanians to vent so emotionally was an

irreversible mistake.

¶ 18. (S) With those concerns in mind, the government has begun to reassert its authority, reining in the ability of the Islamists to freely manipulate public opinion. Indeed, Prince Ali told the Ambassador that the Muslim Brotherhood would be "put back in its box," noting that at a January 23 "victory" rally, the Islamists would be prevented from featuring Hamas speakers from Damascus, home of Khaled Mish'al, head of the group's Political Bureau.

Backing Palestinian Training, But Sensitivities Remain

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¶ 19. (S) Jordan has played a key role in helping the Palestinian Authority maintain stability in the West Bank through the USG-supported training of Palestinian security forces at the Jordan International Police Training Center (JIPTC), and it will likely be receptive to requests that such training be expanded, either at JIPTC or under the auspices of other Jordanian security forces. However, particularly given the current tensions with Israel and public anger over the Gaza violence, the GOJ strongly prefers that Jordan's role stay under the radar. GOJ officials also worry this training will be seen as Jordan training Palestinian forces who would effectively serve as Israeli subcontracted enforcers. (Note: During his recent visit to Jordan, LTG Dayton privately told the Ambassador that Israeli military officials had informed him they were able to draw some of the IDF troops necessary for the recent Gaza operation from the West Bank because its stability was made possible in part by the presence of the JIPTC-trained Palestinians. End Note.)

Jordan-Israel Ties Take a Licking But Keep on Ticking

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¶ 10. (S) While senior Jordanian officials and the political elite strongly value the 1994 peace treaty with Israel and maintain a strong, if quiet, security and intelligence relationship, tensions in the past year have made defending Jordan-Israel ties more difficult than normal. Beyond Gaza, Jordan has grown increasingly frustrated with Israel over several issues ranging from fears that Israel will unilaterally rebuild an ascent to the Mughrabi Gate entrance to the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount (and thereby ignore Jordanian political and religious equities); to anger that Israel released terrorist Samir Quntar to Hizballah even as it insisted that Jordan continue to imprison Jordanian citizens convicted of terrorism in Israel; to embarrassment

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that Israel was talking indirectly to Hamas through Egypt to arrange the cease-fire whose termination precipitated the Gaza fighting - even as Jordan shunned the group; to a growing concern that Israel was not serious about pursuing a two-state solution.

¶ 11. (S) Public cries for Jordan to sever ties with Israel were particularly loud during the Gaza violence, yet the GOJ did not succumb to that pressure (or the advice offered privately by one former senior aide to the King to expel the Israeli Ambassador to get ahead of and ultimately to cauterize public outrage). Jordan's Ambassador to Israel, who was already in Amman for an MFA conference when the violence broke out, did, however, stay in Amman throughout. Most economic cooperation continues, with Jordan and Israel pressing the U.S. to approve (which it did) the creation of Satellite Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ), whose exports require content from both countries to qualify for duty- and tariff-free entry to the U.S. Jordan and Israel also continue to work on a joint proposal on cumulation of origin for goods exported from both countries under their respective Free Trade Agreements with the U.S.

¶ 12. (S) Comment: We do not pretend to be able to precisely

divine how Jordan might respond if the bilateral Jordanian-Israeli irritants grow more acute and the peace process founders, but the instinct to "do something" in the face of perceived Israeli intransigence could prevail over cooler heads - and, indeed, over Jordan's true interests. The King and his advisors, who throughout the Gaza crisis were constantly asking us for a ray of sunshine to mollify their angry public, will surely be hoping your visit will leave them with something concrete they can use to assure their disillusioned populace that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. And that the tunnel is not too long. As an aside, January 30, the day you arrive in Jordan, is the birthday of both the King and his son Hashem. End Comment.

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